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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 013282

SIPDIS

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From American Consulate Medan # 31, 2006

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SUBJECT: Aceh: Election Update

¶1. (U) Summary: Aceh will hold provincial elections on December 11, the province's first since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the government and pro-independence forces in Helsinki in 2005. According to the election rules, candidates must receive more than 25 percent of the vote to win outright. Because of the large number of candidates running for governor, a runoff election will likely be necessary. Aceh's geography, poor infrastructure, and level of development pose significant logistical challenges, and some election regulations lack the specificity needed to enforce them effectively. The U.S. is providing substantial assistance to ensure that the elections are free, fair, and successfully conducted. End Summary.

#### Election Schedule

¶2. (U) On December 11, Aceh will hold elections for Governor and Vice Governor, Mayor and Vice Mayor of Banda Aceh and Lhokseumawe, and Head and Deputy Head of every District except Bireuen and Aceh Selatan.

¶3. (U) After the voting has been completed, Aceh will tabulate the votes in a multi-level process which may take several weeks. On election day, each polling station will tabulate its own results. The following day, they are scheduled to send their ballot boxes and counts to a sub-district office which will re-tabulate the votes. The sub-districts have five days to complete their count and deliver the ballots and results to the district level, which then has five days to verify and audit the results before submitting them to the provincial election commission.

¶4. (SBU) Because of this time consuming process, tabulation and verification is not scheduled to be completed until January 1 - nearly 3 weeks after the election. Several district KIP offices have told us that, despite the protracted schedule, they intend to complete their official tallies between 48 and 72 hours after the election.

¶5. (SBU) Many observers identify the layered and time consuming approach to tabulation as a significant weakness in the electoral process because it offers multiple opportunities to manipulate the outcome. Election officials acknowledge this, but believe that it can be managed by the

Election Supervisory Committee, which is assigning more than 600 monitors to oversee the election. Several district KIP offices have devised special procedures whereby they will collect vote count data directly from polling stations to prevent sub-district level offices from manipulating the election.

#### Picking the Winner

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¶16. (U) Under the election law, a candidate must receive more than 25 percent of the vote to win. Because of the number of candidates contesting the election, it is likely that no candidate will obtain 25 percent in the first round, necessitating a runoff between the top two candidates 90 days after the first round.

#### Independent Candidates

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¶17. (U) Many of the candidates in these elections are running as independents, a privilege accorded to the province according to the terms of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and implemented in the new law governing Aceh. Elsewhere in Indonesia, candidates must be sponsored by a national political party.

¶18. (U) Independent candidates are competing in every election; slightly less than half of them are informal GAM candidates. In at least one district, Bener Meriah, the former head of an anti-independence militia is running as an independent against a former GAM commander who is also running as an independent. At the province level, three of eight pairs of candidates are independent, including both Irwandi Yusuf from GAM and former TNI Commander for Aceh, Gen. Djali Yusuf.

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#### Logistical and Regulatory Challenges

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¶19. (SBU) Logistical challenges are the most significant obstacle officials face in this election. They point out that 2.6 million voters will cast their ballots in more than 8,500 polling stations throughout the province. Many of the polling stations are located in remote villages with limited communications and transportation infrastructure. Privately, province-level KIP officials worry that mistakes will inevitably be made and some polling stations may not receive voting materials on time. Lower level KIP offices are more optimistic that they can overcome these challenges.

¶10. (SBU) In addition, the Chief of Provincial Election Supervisory Body has complained that he lacks the tools to enforce election regulations because the law does not stipulate punishments for violations. Many candidates, for example, have posted campaign materials in contravention of the regulations, but it is not clear what sanctions, if any, should be applied. Should a party attempt to intimidate voters or engage in blatant vote buying - problems which he believes are inevitable - he has, he said, no way to punish violators.

#### U.S. Assistance to the Electoral Process

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¶11. (U) The United States is providing approximately \$2 million for election support, including USAID-funded programs to strengthen election management, voter education, and election integrity. USG assistance has supported an audit of voter registration throughout the province and is facilitating the training of 35,000 Indonesian election monitors and 10,000 poll workers. The Embassy will also send approximately 35 staff members to monitor the election. Several organizations, including the European Union, have announced that they will field election monitoring teams as well.

PASCOE